

PIAZZA NAVONA, HARVARD SQUARE, PICCADILLY CIRCUS: A STUDY ABOUT MORPHOLOGY AND USE

by

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Submitted to the Department of Architecture in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Architecture Studies at the

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is about lively urban spaces and their distinctive characteristics. Its objective is to look at the various aspects responsible for the dynamic atmosphere of such environments, identifying the role played by their physical configuration within this context.

It recommends the inclusion of a historical approach in the analysis of urban spaces, since the studies so far conducted have primarily focused on their physical aspects without providing very successful results. The possible contributions of the historical approach are examined in the investigation of three squares well-known for their liveliness and attractive power: Piazza Navona (Rome, Italy), Harvard Square (Cambridge, U.S.A.) and Piccadilly Circus (London, England).

Based on a historical review, the main aspects influencing the character of the squares are grouped into three categories: form, use and relation to the city. These categories, nevertheless, are not relevant when considered independently, because they assume a meaningful role only through their participation in a set of tight relationships. The study also explores the situations of change experienced by the squares, since the historical perspective has unveiled the fact that changes have always affected their formal, functional and contextual characteristics, while being intended to preserve their lively atmosphere.

Thesis Supervisor: Edward Robbins
Title: Assistant Professor

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this thesis is to look at the different aspects that contribute to the liveliness and highly dynamic atmosphere of some urban spaces. It also attempts to identify the role played by their physical configuration within this context.

My concern with this matter arose from the fact that many planners, designers and people from other fields, studying or writing about the organization of our environment, have not achieved very successful results with a discussion focused primarily on the physical aspects of urban spaces. The topics covered seem to be insufficient; in other words, some important issues have not been tackled so far. Some writers, like Kevin Lynch in "The Image of the City" and "Good City Form," or Christopher Alexander in "A Pattern Language" (Ref. 21,20,13), have analyzed the city and its parts considering almost exclusively their formal elements. They deal with characteristics that can be understood from direct observation, like dimension, shape, scale, number of people and vehicles, location and type of activities. It is an analysis based on countable aspects visually identifiable. On the other hand, other intellectuals --Philip Thiel in

"Notes on the Description, Scaling, Notation, and Scoring of Some Perceptual and Cognitive Attributes of the Physical Environment" and Stuart Rose in "A Notation/Simulation Process for Composers of Space" (Ref. 25)-- are involved in the formulation of notation systems. These systems are meant to indicate human movement in time and space, and transformations in the perception of various objects, due to the displacement of the observer. Their argument is that designers and planners have not been able to improve the quality of our environment, because the tools provided by the conventional techniques are not appropriate for the full representation of its characteristics. Still, there are other researchers, such as Yi-Fu Tuan in "Topophilia" and Edward T. Hall in "The Hidden Dimension" (Ref. 26,18), who phrase the question in terms of environmental perception. They believe that the key to the problem is understanding how people perceive, structure and evaluate their physical surroundings in relation to the way the human cognitive apparatus takes its form. However, even if all the information that could possibly be gathered through the means offered by these methods is available, there is still a gap to be covered. How can the data be processed and analyzed? How can it be interpreted? How can it be transformed into useful knowledge, able to be applied in a concrete design situation?

My hypothesis is that an additional approach should be introduced to the study of physical environments: the historical one. It would provide another dimension to the understanding of what the many variables that form an urban space are and how they interrelate to produce specific results. Given that the present situation of any urban space is the outcome of a continuous process of transformation through time, the historical perspective will supply a complementary comprehension of how these spaces came to be, how and why they have changed and assumed a particular expression in modern times. Within this framework, the history of these places reveals a richer meaning, which goes beyond a static description of events according to a chronological order. It embodies the dynamic and everchanging balance among the varied aspects responsible for the nature of urban spaces.

I will pursue this argument through the investigation of three squares in major cities: Piazza Navona (Rome, Italy), Harvard Square (Cambridge, U.S.A.) and Piccadilly Circus (London, England). These squares were selected on the basis of three criteria. First, they were to be widely recognized as very busy and active places, able to attract large numbers of people during the day until late in the evening. Since the choices were based on the way these places are commonly portrayed, my personal experience of them was helpful, but not vital to a more accurate

interpretation of their situation and context. Second, the squares were to be located in cities of considerable size, where people are presented with a range of alternative places to visit. Third, the squares should also participate in the contemporary urban fabric and network of interrelations of the city, appealing not only to tourists, but to local residents as well.

The study starts with the historic reconstruction of the squares' evolution, concentrating on the events that caused meaningful changes in their characteristics, from the moment of their creation until the present day. It then proceeds to examine the history of each square separately, establishing correlations between changes in its physical configuration and the kind and intensity of activities performed within its space. This analysis is envisaged as a means to unveil the possibility of a reciprocal relationship shared by form and use. The next step considers the three examples together, exploring the diversity of the transformation processes described by them. The various aspects significantly influencing the character of the squares are organized in three correlated categories: form, use and relation to the city.⁽¹⁾ These categories are

(1) The three categories are not mentioned in a hierarchical order.

examined individually, as well as in reference to the interrelations they have established through time. This interpretation aims to discuss the contribution made by the historical perspective to a more comprehensive understanding of how urban spaces become lively and attractive environments.

HISTORY⁽¹⁾

PIAZZA NAVONA

The first records from the area corresponding nowadays to Piazza Navona date from the Roman Empire, when first Caesar and then Augustus ordered the construction of a temporary wooden enclosure for the practice of sports. Under Nero it had evolved into an amphitheater (Gymnasium neroniano) for the celebration of a Roman tournament, similar to the Greek Olympic games. Domiziano in 86 B.C. was responsible for the construction of the "Agoni Capitolini," an enormous stadium made of marble and surrounded entirely by roads. The last mention of the stadium's being in good condition comes from the 5th century. During all this time, the stadium had been the center of all the great celebrations of the people of the Urbe. However, with the decadence of the Roman Empire and the Barbarian invasions, the whole area was abandoned and the stadium gradually decayed into a disconnected shape of pieces of marble.

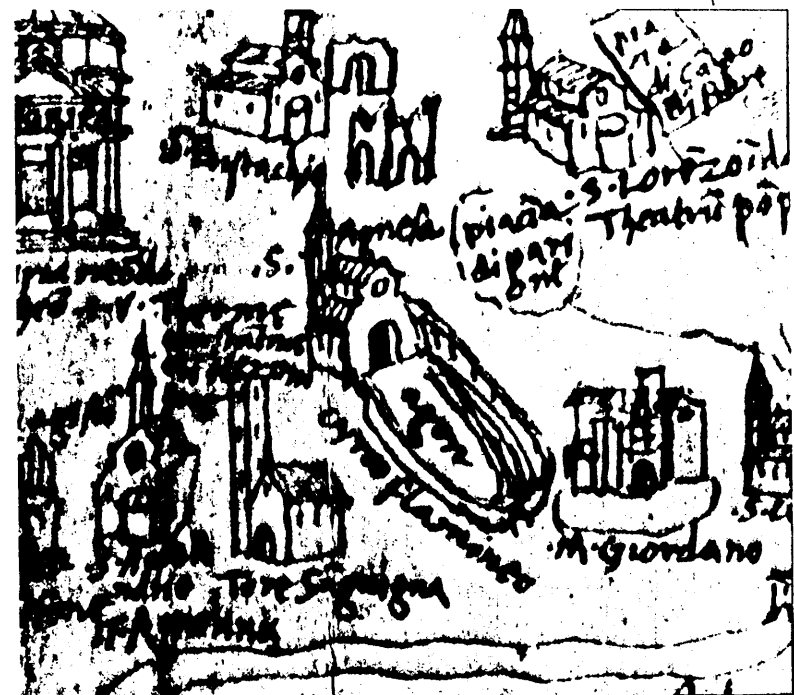


"Agoni Capitolini" in Ancient Rome (Ambrogio Brambilla and Nicola Van Aelst, 1582-1599)

(1) This historical overview is based on the ideas and points of view of the authors listed under Bibliography: History, pp. 46.

During the Medieval period the ruins, partially covered by vegetation, were called "Campus Agonis." Three chapels were erected on top of ancient Roman oratories: one to S. Agnese in the 8th century, another to S. Caterina and a third to S. Andrea (later replaced by the church of S. Giacomo degli Spagnuoli), both in the 10th century. Even during the darkest centuries the area conserved its old tradition as a circus, being the favorite racecourse of the Romans. By that time, the activities had a totally distinct character (as, for example, the carnival celebrations of Fat Wednesday with the parade of the Comune's authorities, as well as competitions and masquerades). All through the Middle Ages the shape of the stadium and the main surrounding routes were preserved.

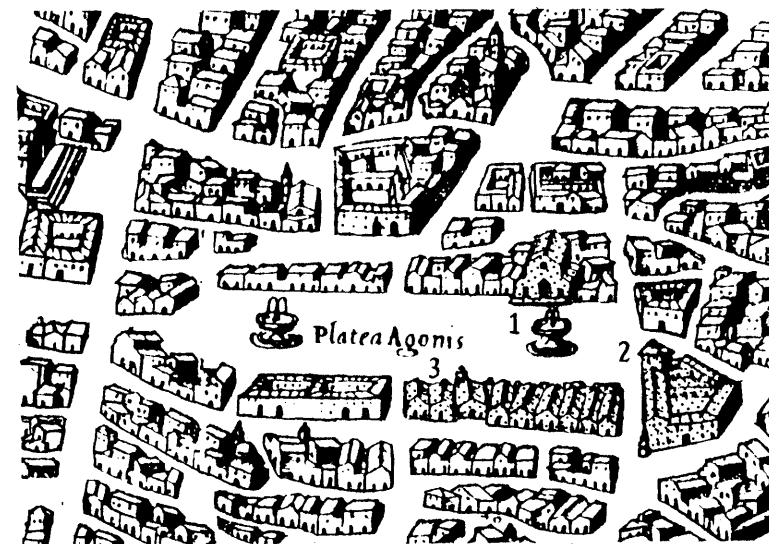
In 1250 the Spanish established themselves in the area with the construction of a hospital and a hospice. A few towers and mansions were built around the open space in order to express the power of the noble families, who were competing for the ownership of the land. The last of these structures appeared in the 15th century. All this construction activity happened in a rather disorderly manner. The buildings had their main facades oriented to the exterior. The area enclosed by them was filled with vegetation and ruins, which provided material for new construction. The principal routes were then the roads that used to encircle the old Roman stadium.



Towers and mansions of noble families around "Campus Agonis" (Alessandro Strozzi, 1474)

The return of the popes from Avignon marked the beginning of a new period of development for the whole city. The Campus Agonis was subjected to many improvements and assumed the character of a commercial and residential center for the religious order. This new status was reflected in the constructive features of the area as well. In 1450 the church of S. Giacomo degli Spagnuoli was constructed (according to the traditional criteria of having the main facade facing the street), as well as three palaces (refer to picture), including one owned by the mayor of the Urbe (Palazzo Orsini) and another by the future Pope Innocenzo X (Palazzo Pamphily). It is interesting to notice that there was a subdivision both in the constructive and zoning aspects of the square: the noble families were located on the south and west sides, while the other two were mainly occupied by the lower classes (especially the north facade, where many coppersmiths had their shops).

The transference of the market from the Campidoglio in 1477 was a very influential event for the future transformation and development of the area. Shortly after that, the central portion of the square was leveled and paved, followed by the immediate spread of vendors' tents. Shops and residences started to open doors to the internal space, changing gradually the old orientation. Further remodeling of buildings and improvements in the

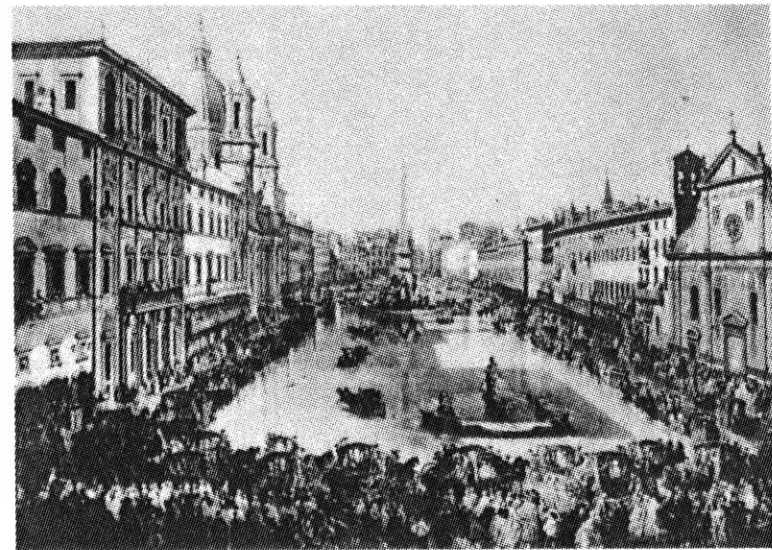


- 1- Church of S. Giacomo degli Spagnuoli
- 2- Palazzo Orsini
- 3- Palazzo Pamphily and Church of S. Agnese

(Mario Cartaro, 1576)

road system happened throughout the 15th century. New accesses were opened (the connection with Piazza di S. Apollinare) and the old ones upgraded. The insertion of the square in the urban tissue was reinforced, without however disrupting its secluded character. In 1577 two fountains and a central watering pool for horses were built, as a result of the new aqueduct, which enhanced the city's water supply. A new activity also became possible: the flooding of the square every Saturday and Sunday of August to celebrate summer. The flat and concave configuration of its bottom was appropriate for this purpose. People from all parts of Rome used to come to contemplate the scene. Gentlemen in carriages or horses paraded across the water, while pedestrians crowded the dry perimeter. New times meant also a new name: Piazza Navona. Not only the tents of the market, but also the central obelisk, installed by Innocenzo X in 1651, contributed to the "ship" aspect of the Piazza. The water from the fountains represented the waves of the ocean during a tempest.

The commercial activities were very intense during the entire 16th century until the middle of the 19th. The only exception was the period between 1644 and 1655, when Pope Innocenzo X decided to give a more sophisticated appearance to the square, since his family was living in the adjacent Palazzo Pamphily. The palace, the gallery,



The flooding of the Piazza (Gian Paolo Pannini, 1756)

the school and the church of S. Agnese (conceptualized as a private chapel) were reconstructed with an unified facade. In the same period the two fountains were remodeled according to the new aesthetic taste. Bernini, responsible for the design of the fountains, and Borromini, the author of S. Agnese's new facade, transformed the square in a synthesis of the Barroque style. The last meaningful modification in the built configuration of Piazza Navona was the reconstruction of Palazzo Orsini, then Palazzo Braschi.

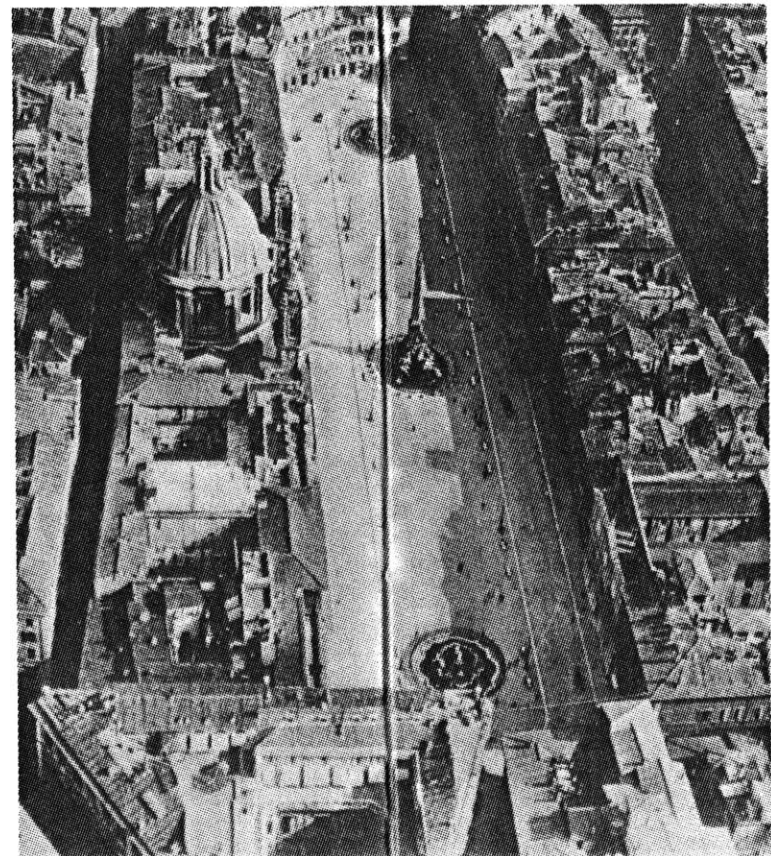
In the middle of the 18th century, the position of "Governor of Piazza Navona," was created. He was assisted by some officials and a police force. His function was to regulate the weekly market and to control the popular protests that traditionally took place in front of the statue of Pasquino (symbol of political and social satire). However, neither regulations nor repression have harmed the festive atmosphere of the square. At the end of the century, a period of decadence had already spread over the whole district, due to the gradual transference of the center of Rome to Piazza Colonna. This process reached its climax with the total abandon of the church of S. Giacomo in the second half of the 19th century.



Fountain dei Fiumi and Church of S. Agnese with new facade in Baroque style (G.B. Moore, 1837)

The relocation of the market in Campo di Fiori in 1869 represented a first step toward the recuperation of the square. It was followed by the redesign of the sewerage, the renewal of the pavement and the installation of a modern gas illumination system. The intensity of life from the old times was finally revived, after the opening of Corso Vittorio Emanuele. It concentrated a great flux of traffic in the adjacencies of the square, meaning a new incentive to commercial activities. Moreover, the occupation of Palazzo Braschi by the Ministry of Interior Affairs, the renovation of the church of S. Giacomo by the missionaries of the S. Cuore, and the completion of the fountain dei Calderari expressed the new importance assumed by the Piazza in the city's life.

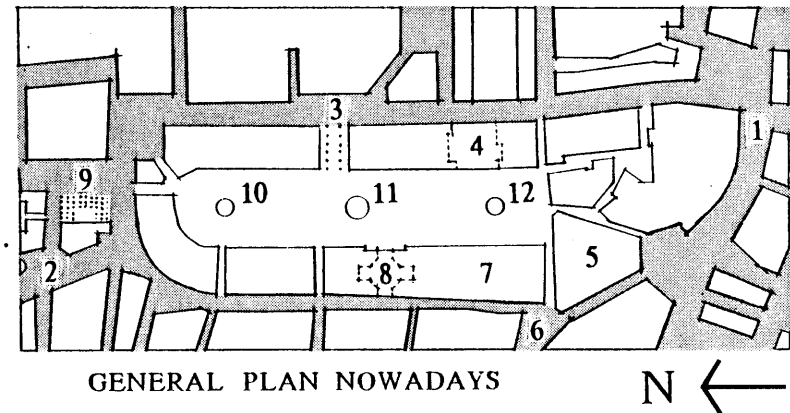
The preservation of the area had been threatened since 1873 by many regulatory proposals, which suggested the connection of a new growing district to Corso Vittorio Emanuele through the square (refer to map on next page). Artistic associations and private groups unified their protests against the extension of via Zanardelli, until the plan was dropped. Corso del Rinascimento, running parallel to the square, is able to perform the functions envisaged for the new artery, without interfering with the Piazza. The houses along the curved edge, requiring demolition for safety reasons, were reconstructed in the same fashion of the original ones. This principle of



Aerial view of Piazza Navona in the beginning of the century

intangibility applied to the square has been strongly reaffirmed by the new city plan, which attempted to protect the artistic and historic characteristics of the city against most of the modern dangers.

Even though the scenery has been physically protected, the performed activities have been drastically transformed through the centuries. Religious holidays and important political and religious events were always celebrated there. Many activities have continually contributed to the unique atmosphere and reputation of the square: numerous forms of commerce (either stable or itinerant), small industries, carnival parades, races, lotteries, horse circuses, open-air and puppet theaters, singers, storytellers and vagabonds, and even patriotic demonstrations. The level of the activities was so intense from the 16th century to the beginning of the modern times that the Piazza expanded its energy to the adjacent smaller squares. Nowadays, however, during only one night of the year, the commemoration of the Feast of the Epiphany, Piazza Navona revives the colors, light, movement, and noise of the old times. Nevertheless, it still preserves the traditional warmth and dynamics, which are expressed through activities more adequate to the modern way of life. Its various cafes and restaurants are a favorite place for evening social meetings, whereas its perimeter suggests a good track for the weekend jogging.

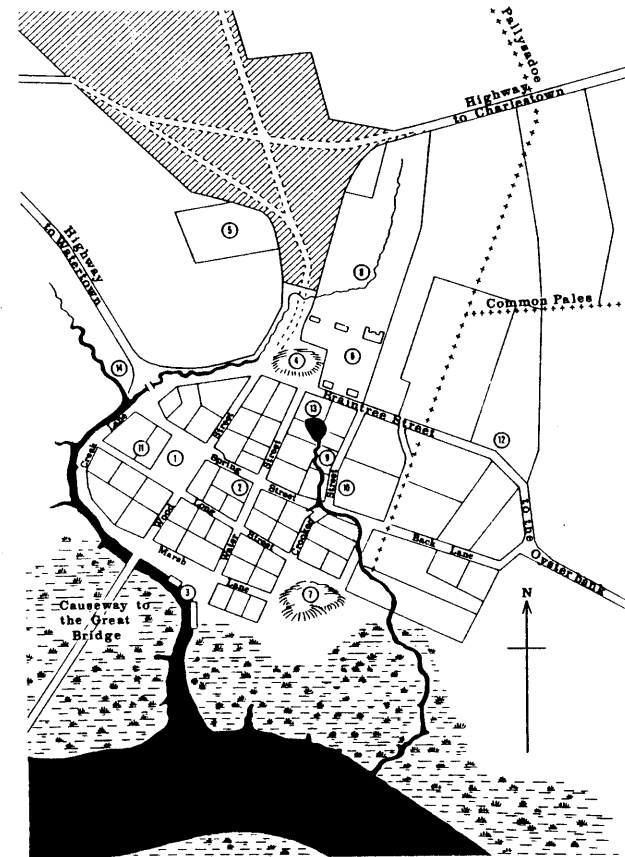


- 1) Corso Vittorio Emanuele
- 2) Via Zanardelli
- 3) Corso del Rinascimento
- 4) S. Giacomo degli Spagnuoli
- 5) Palazzo Braschi
- 6) Piazza Pasquino
- 7) Palazzo Pamphily
- 8) Church of S. Agnese
- 9) Piazza S. Apollinare
- 10) Fountain dei Calderari
- 11) Fountain dei Fiume
- 12) Fountain del Moro

HARVARD SQUARE

The area now known as Harvard Square was first a wide space midway between the Common (a great triangle of cow pasture that extended to the borders of Old Cambridge) and the compact center of the village (established in 1630 on an irregular grid). On a slightly higher ground than the village, the area was originally called Watch House Hill. It was mainly used as a connecting link among the settlement and the roads leading to Watertown and Charlestown. Two events soon after 1650 had significant implications for the importance of the locality: one was the relocation of the meetinghouse on the former site of the watchhouse (refer to map); the other was the construction in 1660–62 of a bridge over the Charles River at the end of Wood Street (now John F. Kennedy Street). Since this bridge was the only river crossing for many miles, all the north–south traffic was funneled into it through the square. Soon John F. Kennedy Street became the prime business location. The shape of the future Harvard Square was irregular and its boundaries unclearly defined. On the west side there was the Burying Ground (fenced in 1636), one house and a large vacant lot. To the east and south there were the college and the meetinghouse, while along Braintree Street (nowadays Massachusetts Avenue) stood a few commercial establishments. The ground was uneven, presenting a low

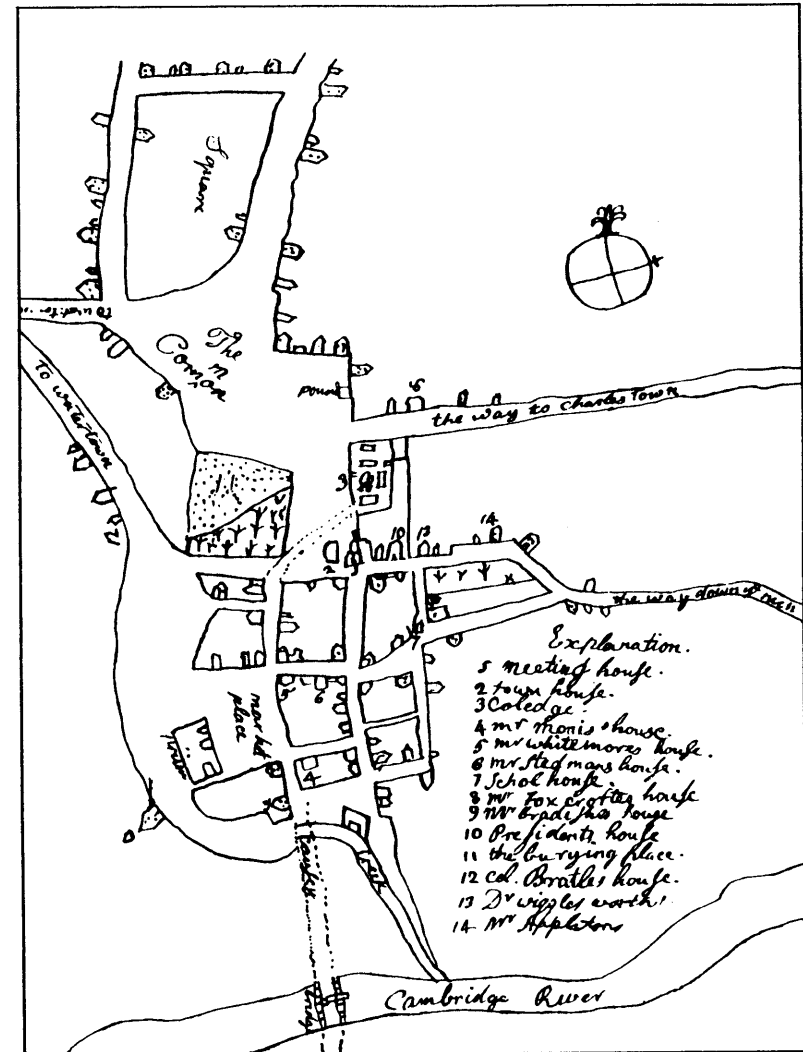
Old Cambridge in 1670



- | | |
|--|-------------------|
| 1. MARKET PLACE, 1635 | |
| 2. SITE OF FIRST MEETINGHOUSE, 1632 | |
| 3. TOWN WHARF AND FERRY LANDING, 1635 | |
| 4. WATCH HOUSE HILL; SITE OF LATER MEETINGHOUSES | |
| 5. BURYING GROUND | |
| 6. HARVARD COLLEGE | |
| 7. SITE OF PROPOSED FORT | |
| 8. BROOK FROM COLLEGE YARD TO CREEK LANE | |
| 9. FIRST SCHOOLHOUSE | |
| 10. FIRST JAIL | |
| 11. SECOND JAIL, 1681 | 13. BARRIT'S POND |
| 12. PARSONAGE, 1670 | 14. TOWN SPRING |

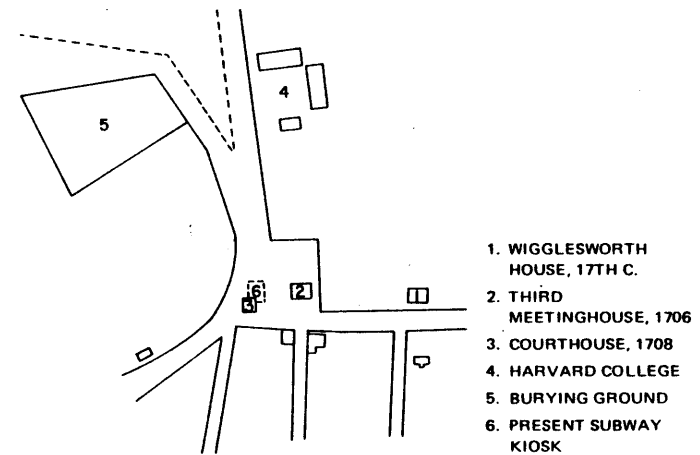
mound and a small brook. Improvements came slowly, and the construction of the second Harvard Hall in 1677 represented a significant achievement. For many years a curious ambivalence existed concerning the visual relationship between the square and the surrounding buildings. The first group of college buildings was entirely isolated from the square, and even the meetinghouse of 1650, the principal building adjacent to it, turned its back facing south toward the village.

The early 18th century brought new buildings and increased usage to the area: a new meetinghouse was erected on the same site of its predecessor in 1706, still facing Massachusetts Avenue (refer to sketches on next page). A courthouse, built in 1708, stood free in the square. It probably faced towards the meetinghouse, turning its back to the traffic along John F. Kennedy Street and its flank to the square. The placement of these two important buildings restricted the width of Massachusetts Avenue, and vaguely defined a square shape for the site. About 1750 a significant portion of the perimeter of the square was encircled by public and private buildings, giving its central space a stronger definition. In 1756 another meetinghouse (the fourth) was constructed, standing well back from Massachusetts Avenue. The setback was due to the placement of the new meetinghouse several feet behind the old one, which remained in use during the

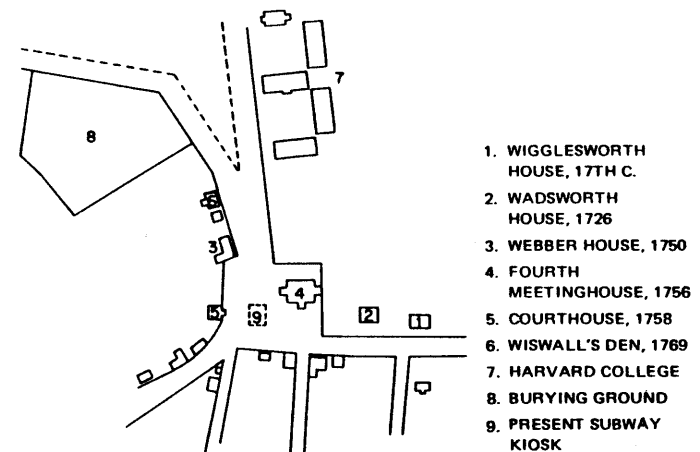


Earliest known plan of the village (around 1745)

construction of its successor. The new structure was again oriented toward the village, having nevertheless a stair-tower opened to the square. Along the east side three new college buildings arose, organized around a quadrangular courtyard. Together with the earlier buildings, the complex formed quite an impressive group fronting the square and the Common. They retained a high degree of independence, even though contributing to the reputation of the square by their proximity. The west side of the square was also improved, with the construction of a new courthouse of some architectural interest in 1758. Furthermore, two quite elaborated dwellings with two and three floors were added. However, the layout of the square was still indeterminate, and would pass through many changes in the subsequent years. Its northern end (the insertion with the Common) used to form a bottleneck 80 feet wide, as opposed to the 150 feet of today. Just south of that, at the west side, the building alignment described an indentation, which emphasized the geometrical shape of the square. The location of the new meetinghouse, right behind the old one, eliminated the visual separation with Massachusetts Avenue. However, in 1812 a market house was erected almost on the same site of the 1708 courthouse. It restricted once more the width of the avenue, marking its intersection with the thoroughfare leading to the new West Boston bridge.



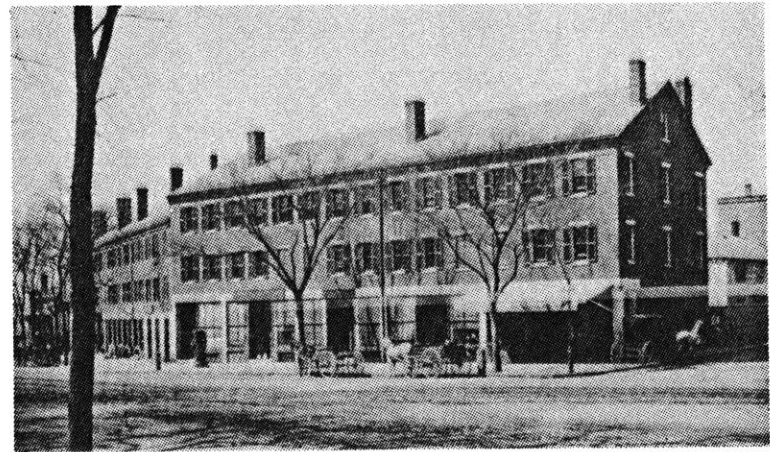
Harvard Square in 1710



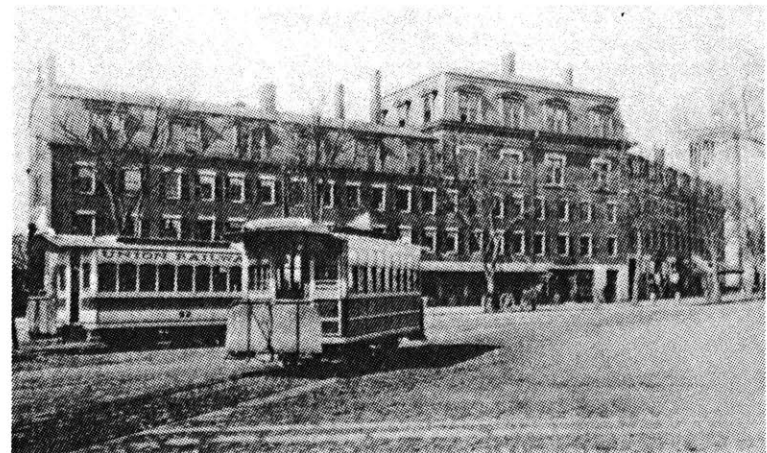
Harvard Square in 1770

During the 1800's burst of building activity, Harvard Square became the focus of Old Cambridge. Two new college buildings were built, as well as a Gothic church for the Unitarians on the northwest side of the site in 1833. Another building of some special architectonic characteristics was the Lyceum, erected in 1841 with an imposing flight of steps and an impressive Doric portico. The Lyceum, due to its unique design, added status to the square in visual terms. In addition to the public buildings, the town's main shops were located around the square, in houses much larger in scale than the ones that preceded them. In 1832 the college built a dormitory (College House) beside the courthouse. It was a bulky structure of three stories with a few stores on the ground floor and a terminus for the omnibus lines.⁽¹⁾ College House was of considerable real estate significance, since it pioneered a kind of building that would dominate Harvard Square until the end of the 19th century: the

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- (1) By the time of the Civil War Harvard Square had become a focus of car routes between the outer suburbs of Cambridge and Boston. The economic expansion of the 1880's generated a number of additional car lines, which also terminated at Harvard Square. Among them, there was the electric trolley along Massachusetts Avenue, installed in 1889-1890. The next important change came with the construction of the present subway system and Harvard Square station between 1909-1912.



College House in 1867



College House in 1878, after the addition of a mansard roof according to the latest fashion

private dormitory. From the 18 buildings erected in this period, only two were sponsored by the college. This sudden demand for dormitories was caused by the rapid growth of Harvard University, whose student body increased almost fourfold in the period of 1869–1909. It was not a response to any demand generated in Boston, since the city's development was well under way before the arrival of the trolley in 1889.

This dormitory construction inaugurated what might be called the first rebuilding of Harvard Square, marking a new era in its architectural history. The buildings conformed to the French style of architecture, current in Boston for more than a decade. They were usually three or four stories tall with high mansard roofs, constructed of brick and extended to the lot lines. This pattern of floor plan did not allow for the existence of either front or side yards. It represented an innovation to the traditional typology of the wooden dwellings from the 17th and early 18th centuries. Between 1850 and 1900 this new style of building would transform the architectural character of the square. Its large scale created a definite sense of spatial enclosure, as well as a somewhat dwarfing effect. Other buildings of pure commercial character remained singularly simple during these years. The only exception was a four-story building at the triangular insertion of

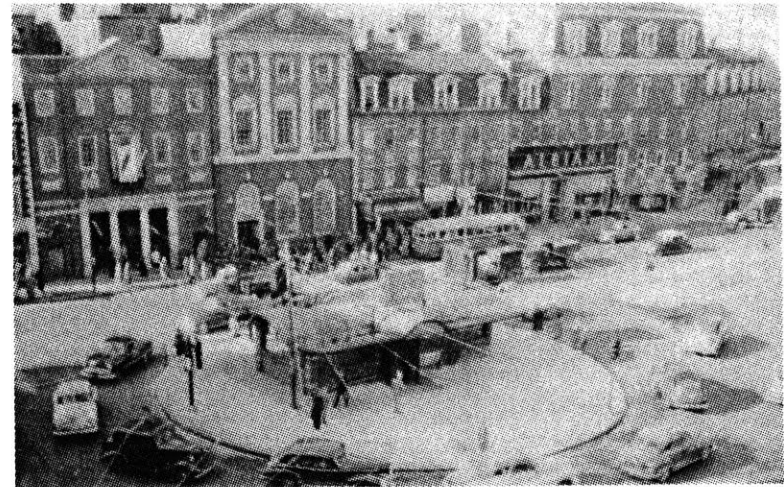


South side of Harvard Square with new architectural character in the mid-1870's

John F. Kennedy and Brattle Street, whose ground floor was initially used as a post-office.

In 1916 an office building erected for the Harvard Trust Company ushered in a new phase, which would further transform the appearance of Harvard Square. The new architectonic fashion, the Georgian Revival, was expressed by red brick walls trimmed with white limestone. The style was soon copied by other buildings facing the square. When Harvard University started to apply the same idiom for its buildings bordering Massachusetts Avenue, the architectural character of the square became fairly unified. This later wave of building swept away most traces of the 18th and early 19th centuries and brought to an end the first rebuilding of the square. The beginning of a new phase was suggested with the university-sponsored construction of Holyoke Center between 1960-1967. It introduced a formal language of concrete panels very different from the traditional forms of brick and wood. Besides that, the way in which the planning encompasses the entire block, as opposed to the house-size lot, indicates a new approach to architecture.

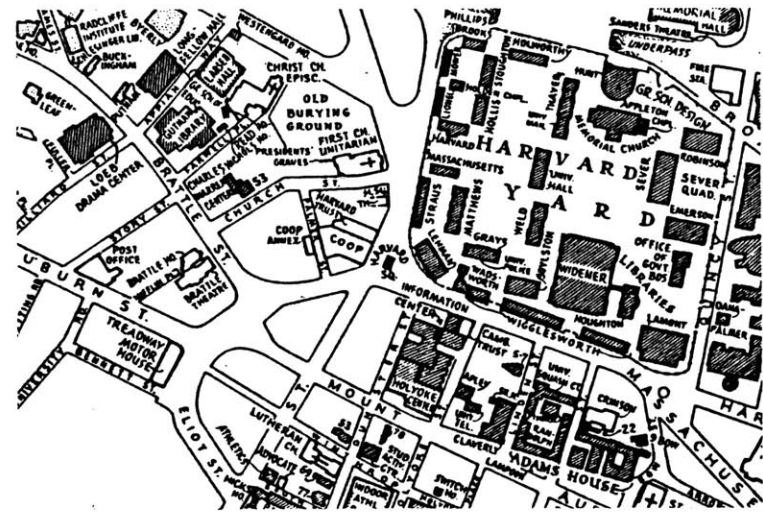
By the end of the 1960's the profusion of cars, resulting from the conversion of all major roads in the area surrounding the square, started clogging the streets and threatening pedestrians. Attempts to deal with the traffic



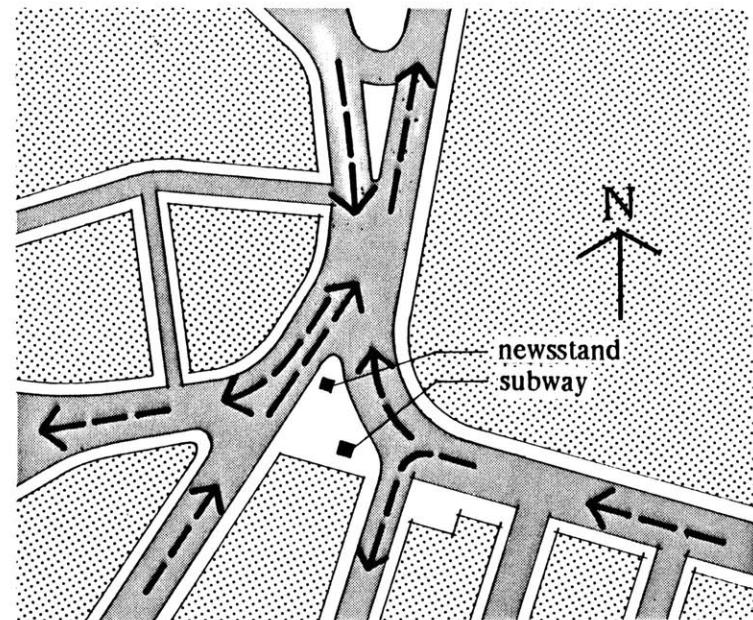
Harvard Square in 1949
(Harvard Trust Company, second building from left; Harvard Cooperative Society, center)

by widening the streets were not very effective, while they impoverished the urban landscape by eliminating numerous trees. In relation to architectural features, the unified facade of Harvard dormitories (with two and three stories) along Massachusetts Avenue provides a counterbalance to the competing shapes and sizes of the nearby buildings. Reinforced by the wrought-iron fence, they form a clear limit to the open space of the square, while their low height and sparse trees help to relieve the visual congestion of the avenue. Holyoke Center, with its greater dimensions, relates to its surrounding buildings through a three-story pavilion, the Cambridge Trust Company. The spacious promenade that leads through the center of the building to Mt. Auburn Street gives an alternative to the crowded sidewalks, introducing a new kind of urban environment to Cambridge. The west side of Harvard Square presents a bulk of uniform brick construction, which walls in the open space. The variety of facade components expresses the architectural development of the square since the 1800's.

Modern times have imposed the need for radical changes. Traffic has become much heavier and incompatible with pedestrian circulation and safety. Administrative authorities and public opinion are interested in conserving the main features of the square, while improving traffic conditions. The new plan, currently under implementation, has modified



Harvard Square in 1972

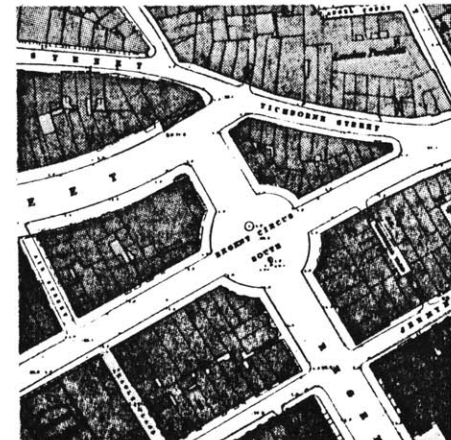


New plan under implementation

the physical organization of Harvard Square, in terms of street and sidewalk layout: the subway entrance has been incorporated into one side of the square with the creation of a large pedestrian area (refer to map). The facades and use of the buildings will not be changed, since the plan is mainly concerned with controlling vehicular circulation. It has been sensitive to the historic evolution of the square, attempting to reestablish a balanced relation among the different forms of activity and movement that create the dynamic quality of Harvard Square: a place where traffic confusion, bright storefronts, flashing lights, crowded sidewalks, peddlars, and street musicians have been since long familiar.

PICCADILLY CIRCUS

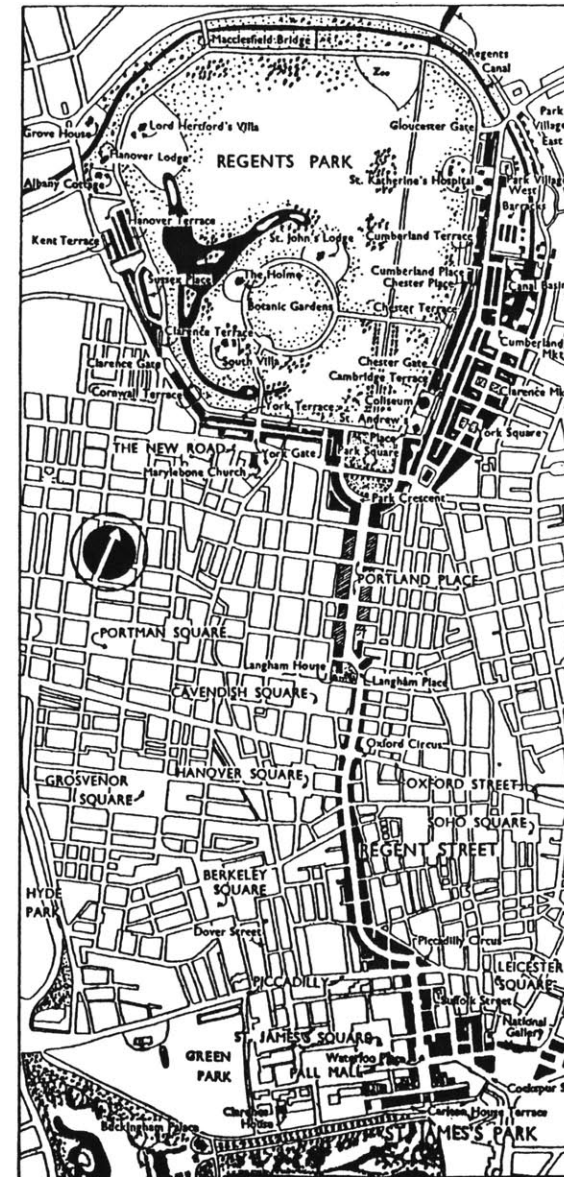
Piccadilly Circus, conceived as a dissected circle of elegant town houses, was originally known as Regent Circus South. Its history cannot be separated from John Nash and his immense plan for London's West End. The plan established Regent's Park layout in the north and Regent Street, connecting it to Carlton House (the royal residence) in the south. It affected the development of the British capital as a whole, having a far-reaching effect on its subsequent northward and southward expansion. Regent Street was considered a prerequisite for the



Nash's Circus in 1819

settlement of the nobility and the professional classes north of New Road. These groups demanded an adequate access to their working place, Westminster, where Parliament, the Law Courts and the public offices were located. By that time, Bond Street was the only thoroughfare that provided this linkage, but it did not have a satisfactory reputation. Nash submitted a plan in 1811 that perfectly attended this demand: a highly picturesque conception of a garden city for the aristocracy, supported by charming panoramas and elegant architecture of a somewhat Parisian flavor. Carlton House had deeply influenced the architectural requirements for the buildings along Regent Street. Many of them were designed by Nash or other architects closely allied with him, so that considerable architectural coherence was attained in all its extension.

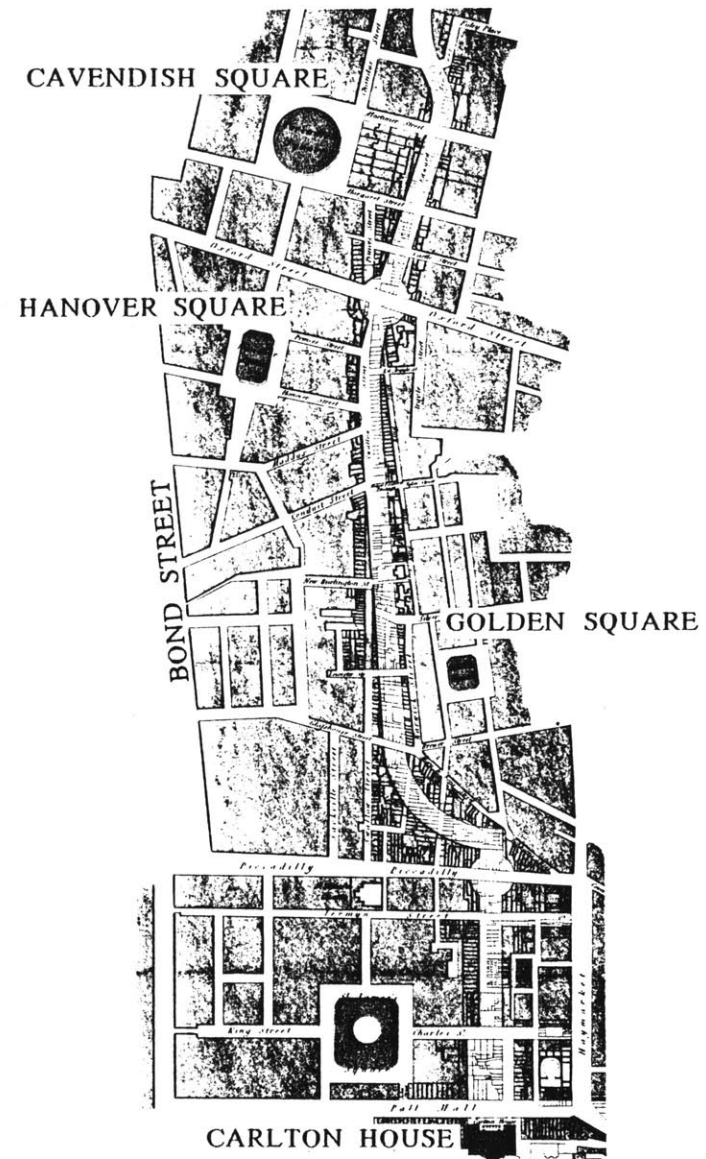
It was Nash's achievement to combine a number of opportunities present at the beginning of the 19th century: the elevation to the Regency of the Prince of Wales, with whom Nash had a close association; the reversion of Marylebone Park to the Crown in 1811; and a strong shift in the national economic situation. The first half of the century was a period marked by social upheaval, in which rapidly expanding commercial and manufacturing enterprises had produced a great enlargement of the moneyed middle class. This led to a boom period in the building trade that demanded ample residences with a



Regent Street connecting Regent's Park (north) to Carlton House (south)

somewhat palatial look. Nash had envisioned Regent Street as a "royal mile," linking two areas with contrasting layouts: to the east the jumbled pattern of Soho around Golden Square; and to the west, the formal, organized, aristocratic section related to Cavendish and Hanover Squares (refer to map). This was a logical line to be adopted. It involved the acquisition of an inexpensive margin of Soho property, while connecting the new thoroughfare to important points in London through the active east-west streets. Nash had skillfully adapted the form of Regent Street to meet the functional requirements of the city, rather than imposing a preconceived architectural form on its fabric. Piccadilly Circus, associated with the Quadrant (the arc-shaped portion of Regent Street just northern of the Circus), represents a device envisioned to accommodate these requirements of such a varied nature. The success of the plan could be tested by the fact that Regent Street immediately became an important center in the civic life of the city. Simultaneously Piccadilly Circus assumed the position of a center of high fashion, crowded with well-dressed passers-by and elegant carriages.

London gradually established itself as an extremely populous city, capital of a powerful empire and an outstanding focus of commerce and trade. This resulted in acute traffic congestion, and the consequent opening of new roads through the city's dense development. In 1886

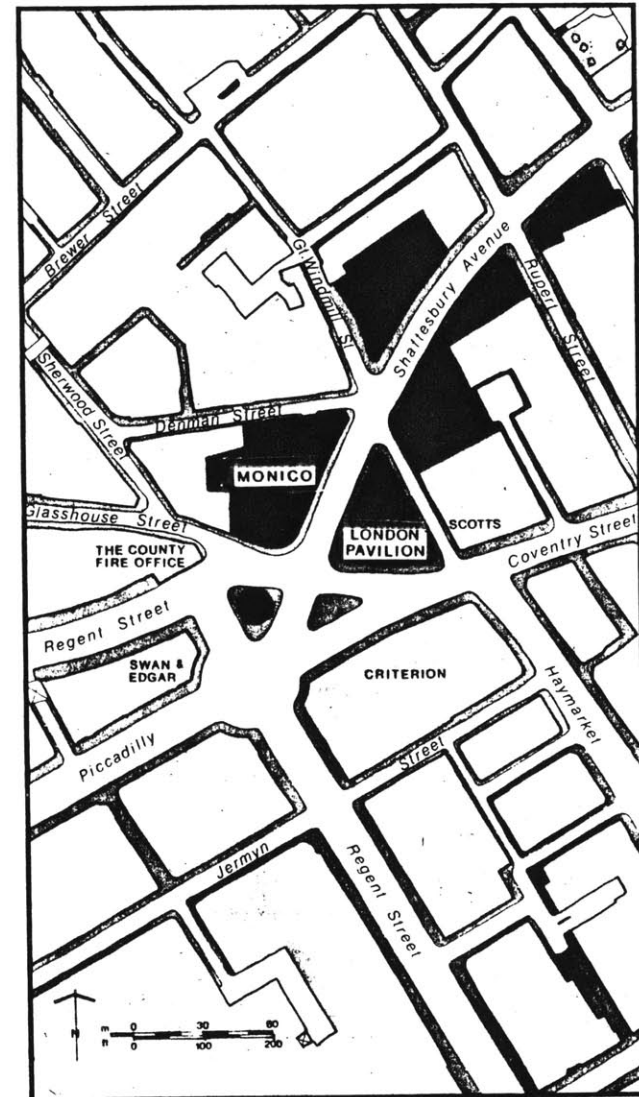


Layout of the "royal mile"
(map from 1814)

Shaftesbury Avenue was constructed through the old Soho area, intersecting the Circus at its northeast segment, which was entirely destroyed (refer to map). Its diagonal alignment formed many oddly shaped sites and short streets. Besides damaging the symmetry of Piccadilly Circus, the new avenue poured an extra stream of vehicles into an already bustling crossroad. The completion of the project was marked by the unveiling in 1893 of the Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain, now universally known as "Eros."⁽¹⁾ The redevelopment of the Circus originated an urban design discussion, which has endured until the present time. The main question has been how to restore the formal cohesion of the Circus, while solving the traffic problems. The greatest difficulty faced during all these years has been the diversity of the conflicting interests involved, due to the divided ownership of the surrounding land.

In the late Victorian and Edwardian years, Piccadilly Circus was transformed into the heart of London's entertainment district. Theaters and music halls sprang up.

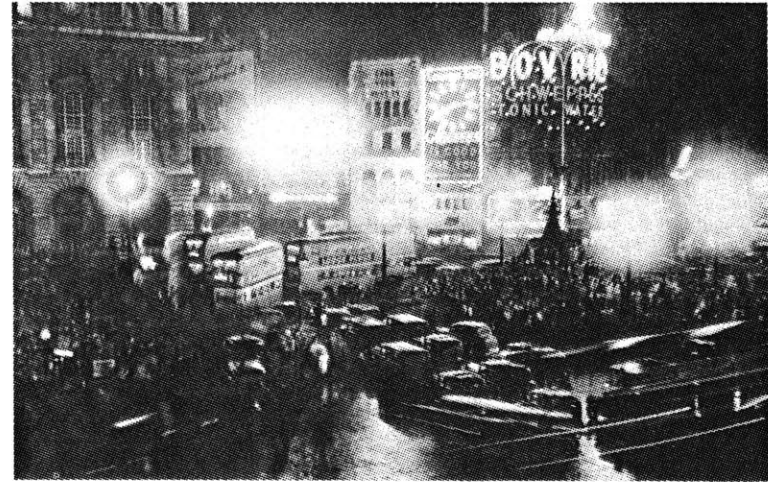
(1) The statue was designed by Sir Alfred Gilbert RA in memory of the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury for his work of social reform. Its overall height is 36 feet (11 meters), and it is made out of pure aluminum and a bronze plinth.



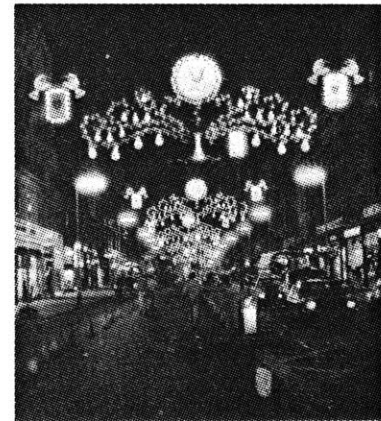
Shaftesbury Avenue opened in 1886

sophisticated shops and popular eating places abounded, and hotels, apartment houses, gentlemen's clubs and offices clustered nearby. Throughout the day and late into the night the Circus was alive with bustle. Its nighttime scene became famous for its incredible mixture of lights from advertising signs, shop windows, street lamps and car lights that created an extremely dynamic technicolor scene. The colorful signs have a strong historic link with the Circus, where they were once pioneering achievements in the world of advertising. It is believed that the first illuminated lettering appeared in the 1890's in Piccadilly Circus at Mellin's Pharmacy on its northeast side.

By the turn of the century, the intensity of activity around the Circus had exceeded its capacity; at the same time the redevelopment potential of its western half became clear. In 1904, the Treasury invited the architect Norman Shaw to prepare designs for rebuilding Piccadilly Circus and the Quadrant. He proposed the 15th century Florentine architectonic style for remodeling the building facades. Such style was considered unsuitable by the businessmen of the area to express the new concepts of shopping. They refused to implement the proposal, and finally the plan was rejected by the Cabinet. In the meantime, in 1906, came the most important transport improvement to the Circus: the opening of the underground

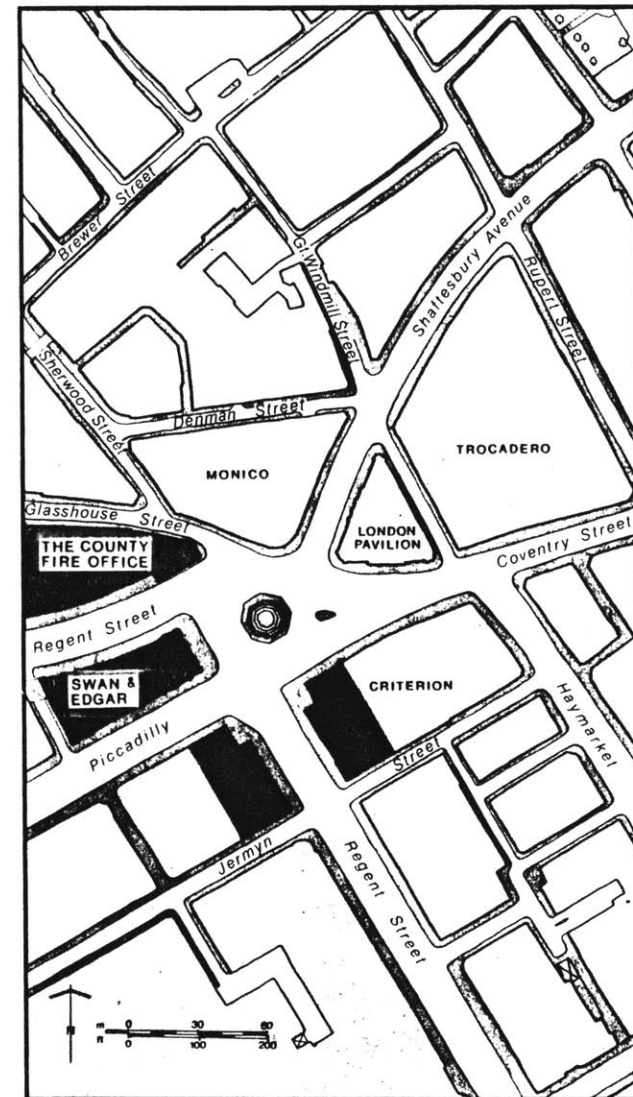


Richness of lights and colors at nighttime



station, serving two lines that converged at this point. In 1915, the Cabinet invited the architect Reginald Blomfield to prepare another design, which should meet modern requirements while retaining as far as possible the character of the existing buildings. Two years later Blomfield's scheme was approved. The plan consisted of squaring the circle, providing it with two main architectural components, Swan & Edgar's store and the new County Fire Office (pictures on pp. 29). The Circus and the Quadrant were interpreted by the architect not simply as a street front, but as a group of buildings visible from all sides, able to offer an interesting skyline and some modeling in the general mass. In order to achieve these results, the 18th-century monumental French architecture was adopted. The redevelopment of the northwest, west and south sides of the Circus was eventually completed in 1928. By then, Piccadilly Circus was more than a confluence of ways; it was London's West End business, amusement and traffic center. It could easily claim to be the busiest and brightest spot in the whole city. With the expansion of the underground service and the increased volume of passengers, the station became inadequate. In the late 1920's it was completely rebuilt, having a large, circular concourse designed by Charles Holden.

The implemented transformations, however, left the traffic problem and the future of the Circus still unresolved.



Blomfield's scheme inaugurated in 1928

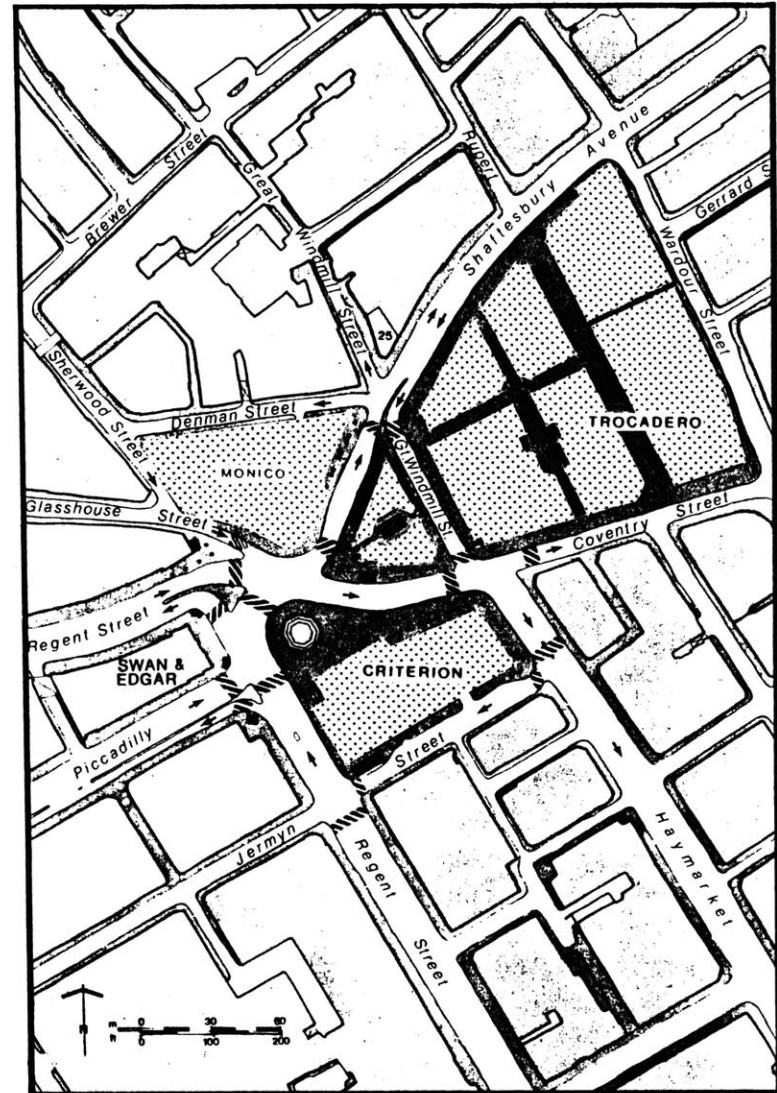
Attention was then directed to the northeast side, but the 2nd World War and post-war priorities postponed any further action until the mid-1950's. That was the time when professional officers of the London County Council (LCC) produced the first schemes, indicating the type and shape of buildings that should be encouraged around the Circus. They also suggested how it could be remodeled in order to meet the new traffic demands. These schemes were conceived merely as a basis for discussion between LCC and the private developers. Nevertheless, an agreement was never reached. Most of the major town planning controversies of the last two decades had made possibly their first appearance at Piccadilly Circus in 1959, when Londoners' way of life was dramatically changing. Post-war austerity had given way to conspicuous consumption, car sales rose enormously and the British approach to urban development changed drastically. Developers and their architect-partners lost interest in conservation. The general attitude, supported by the need for more road space, was to demolish whatever seemed to be necessary, in order to make room for high-rise blocks serviced by wide roads and plenty of parking area. London had jumped into what came to be known as "the property boom." A proposal for a 172-foot-high cruciform tower on the northeast corner of the Circus set off a strong public protest. Broadcasters, writers and an embryonic

environmental lobby united their energies to persuade the Minister to turn down the scheme. As a result, LCC was instructed to draw up a comprehensive plan to reconcile the function of the Circus as a traffic intersection with its function as a place for pedestrians.

During the following years a few other plans were submitted. They presented invariably the same characteristics: massive pedestrians decks above the traffic level, high-rise office buildings and increment of road area. For different reasons (economic, administrative or political) all the plans were dropped. The public opinion, which was confused and unclear in its response, reached a strong consensus in the beginning of the 1970's. The majority was strongly in favor of retaining the present character of the Circus, of rehabilitating the existing buildings, restraining traffic, keeping a balanced mixture of uses and of allowing people to occupy the street level. In 1973 the City Council published a document containing new principles to guide development. These principles closely followed the public requirements, receiving therefore wide support. They became the basis of virtually all the planning decisions made so far. A new era of "small is beautiful" and of incremental planning, in contrast to the previous attitude of "clear-fell" comprehensive redevelopment, had started. In 1974 the Greater London Council's (originally LCC) Planning Committee, considering the future of

Piccadilly Circus, recommended acceptance of the "least change" layout, as well as the retention and improvement of the London Pavilion (picture on next page). These decisions finally directed the further development of the Circus, solving a controversy that had persisted for many years. The Pavilion, in neo-baroque style and plastered with neon signs, did not have a great architectural merit. It did play, however, a especial role in conforming the enclosed atmosphere of the Circus. The building was improved and listed as a monument of architectural interest, inciting the organization of a protective movement.

In 1980 a general plan for Piccadilly Circus, which is currently under implementation, was approved by GLC. According to this scheme, all the landmarks, especially peculiar to the Circus, will be retained. The key sites will be redeveloped mainly behind their existing facades, thus preserving the appearance of the streets. The emphasis will be once more on entertainment and enjoyment. The overall amount of floor space dedicated to these activities and shopping will be greatly increased, while office floor space will remain much the same as today. This new attitude is in marked contrast to the plans of the 1950's and 1960's, which envisaged huge increases in office provision at the expense of entertainment. Eros will be no longer isolated amidst the traffic, that will remain with the same capacity. The statue will be moved



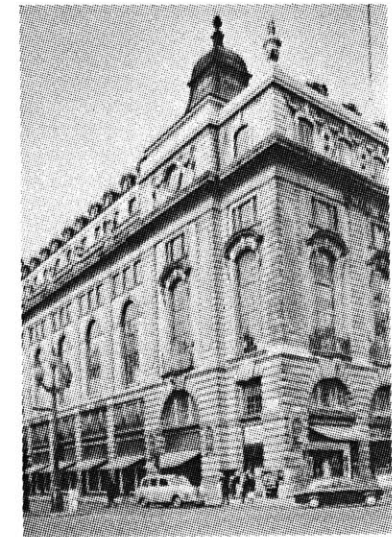
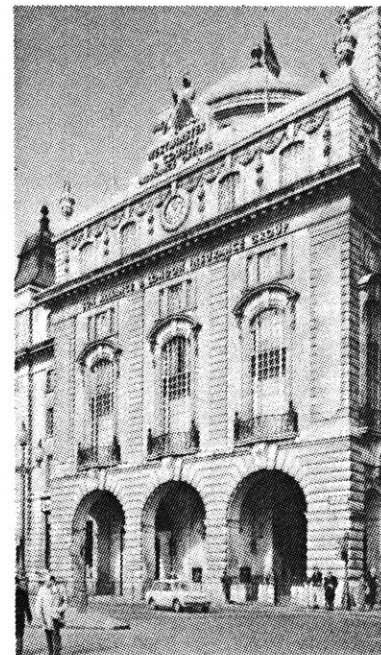
Latest general plan started in 1980

a few yards and incorporated in a paved pedestrian piazza, which extends from the Criterion site into the Circus. Wider sidewalks and more signal-controlled pedestrian crossings will be installed. The main changes in the road network are the widening of Great Windmill Street and the eastern section of Jeremy Street. They will allow south and west-bound traffic to by-pass the Circus, instead of slicing through it. The extra dimension of these streets will be obtained by setting the sidewalks back and creating arcades within the buildings. This device will presumably destroy neither the scale of the streets nor the buildings alongside. The underground circulation and facilities will be also substantially remodeled.

In relation to the buildings surrounding the Circus, there will be no change at all in the County Fire Office, Swan & Edgar's, nor in the Clydesdale Bank (at the south side of Piccadilly). These will be only renovated, since they are listed as buildings of architectural interest. The London Pavilion is to be reconstructed within its present facades and enlarged through the addition of a glazed top floor. It will provide three levels of shopping and other entertainment facilities. The largest development scheme is on Trocadero site, which is being partly redeveloped and partly reconstructed behind the existing exterior walls. The Monico site will be also remodeled and used for commercial and residential purposes.



Cafe Monico (left) and London Pavilion (right) in 1912



County Fire Office and Swan & Edgar's in 1971

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

In this chapter, an analytical interpretation of the historic review previously presented is elaborated within a specific perspective: identify the direct correlation between the historical events and formal changes introduced in the configuration of the squares. It concentrates on how these transformations were implemented, and what their impact on the activities and reputation of the square was.

PIAZZA NAVONA

Since its initial provisory enclosure for the practice of sports, the site of Piazza Navona has been related to important roads that connected Rome to other localities. During the empire the area was quite distant from the center of the Urbe, but still strongly connected to it by the network of roads and by its tradition as a place of important events.

During the Middle Ages the area was practically abandoned. However, its location midway between the Vatican and the Campidoglio attracted some attention to it, resulting in the construction of some Christian chapels on its

perimeter. The area was continually benefited by the revitalization of the city and strengthening of the Church. Its surrounding roads became more and more significant routes, until it was finally transformed into a residential and commercial center for the nobility and the cleric.

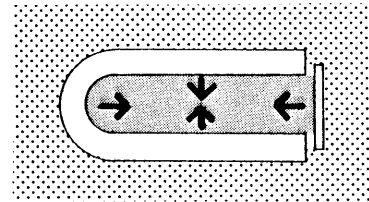
The competition among the different families for the possession of the area was responsible for the construction of palaces and towers, which gave a stronger definition to the space. However, all the buildings' main facades faced the outside, since the main reason for their existence was the adjacency to an important road system. The interior of the stadium remained untouched. Its elevated position in relation to the surrounding routes, as well as the permanence of significant parts of the ancient wall, prevented circulation from cutting across its space. Finally, the market was established in the internal area, which gradually assumed a stronger position in relation to the external roads. Little by little the surrounding buildings changed the location of their doors, having the main entrances through the square.

It then becomes clear how the same form can be interpreted and used in different ways. During the Roman Empire the stadium was a contained form. Its internal space was the center of the activities and, as such, it was oriented towards itself. It was a place to go

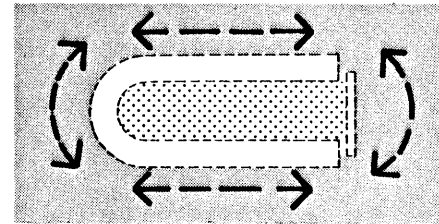
and to stay. During the Middle Ages the surrounding roads concentrated the main uses: a connection between Rome and the Vatican, a route for religious and official parades, and a popular racecourse among the Romans. The activity was then directed to the outside. By the Renaissance its original use was recovered. The interior space, as a marketplace, became more important than the encircling roads.

Within this last interpretation of its form, a new chapter in the history of Piazza Navona started at the end of the 19th century. This new period was marked by the transference of the main civic center of Rome to Piazza Colonna. The square was deprived of part of its meaning and use. The market alone was not able to attract people as before and maintain the traditional character of the square. It assumed a weak and unimportant role, in opposition to the strong impulse it had once offered to the development of the square. The market was by then related to decadence. It needed to be transferred to another site, in order to allow the square to recuperate the original lure, and be characterized by a new image. The construction of Corso Vittorio Emanuele brought a large flux of people and traffic into its adjacencies, stimulating commercial activities of a more sophisticated nature. The Ministry of Interior Affairs was relocated at the square, expressing official concern and respect.

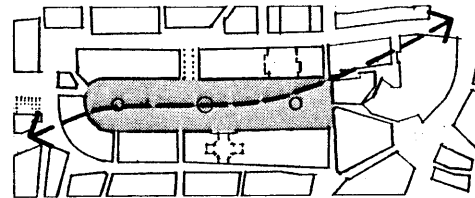
DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS AND USES OF THE SAME FORM



A place containing activities



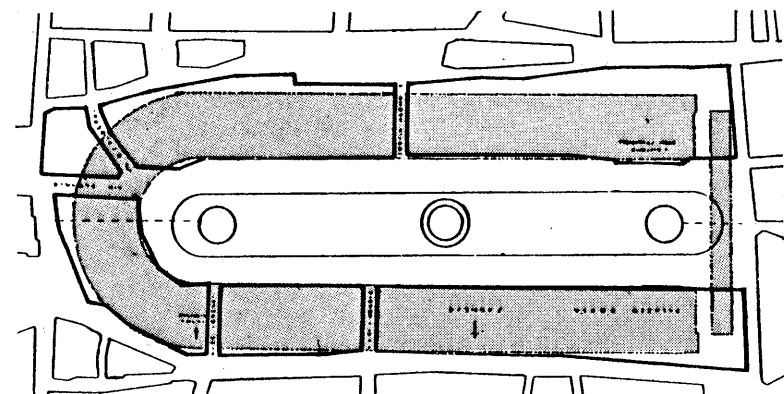
A place surrounded by circulation



Overlapping the two uses

While the interior space of the square became devoid of activities, the city experienced the beginning of a modern era of expansion and increase in traffic volume. The proposed incorporation of the square in the main transportation system of the city disregarded both of the previous interpretations of its form: a place containing activities and a place surrounded by circulation. By introducing circulation in its enclosed space, the plan would probably destroy the cohesion of its form, as well as the characteristics that had supported its survival during so many centuries. The decision ultimately made—to reinforce traffic along the peripheral avenues and to reserve the interior for other kinds of activities—respects and emphasizes the traditional patterns of use. Consciously or unconsciously, the historic example has been followed with positive results. The atmosphere of the square and the demands of modern times have been harmoniously matched.

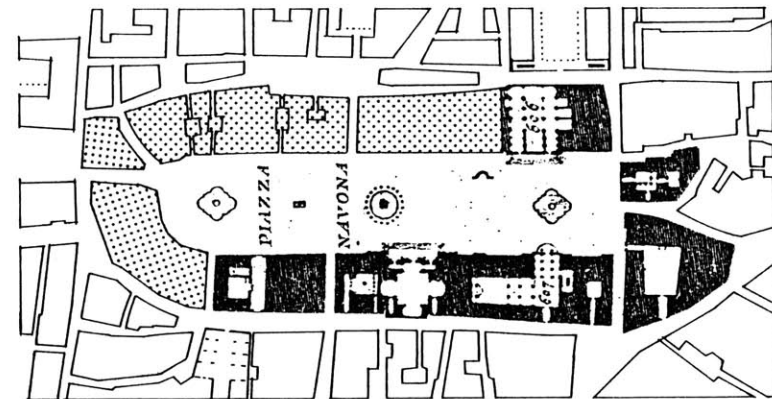
There are still two other aspects to be pointed out: one is the formal features of the Piazza and the other its public character. Since the Middle Ages when the ring of edification was completed, its form and scale have remained the same, no matter what activities were performed. Facades have been remodeled, according to different architectural styles, usually simultaneously to the introduction of new activities or status. Nevertheless, its



Comparison between the perimeter of the ancient stadium and the present configuration of the Piazza

basic physical configuration and proportions have been conserved. As to the second aspect, the original site of Piazza Navona has always had a very public character. During the Roman Empire it was used for competitions and tournaments addressed to the people of the Urbe in general. The construction of private buildings in its surroundings by the beginning of the Renaissance did not overwhelm its relation to the entire city. Even its transformation into a commercial and residential center for the cleric and nobility allowed for other classes more popular in nature to be represented in its perimeter. This zoning can still be observed nowadays: palaces and administrative buildings are located on the south and west edges, whereas commercial activities related to entertainment and tourism spread along the other sides. This social coexistence is expressed not only in the zoning, but also in the way each social group creates and participates in the activities developed within the square.

The history of Piazza Navona can be interpreted as a sequence of ups and downs caused by events somewhat autonomous of the square, but with a direct influence over it. The upswings were usually marked by the introduction of new activities, with a strong appeal to different groups. Its physical environment was often remodeled. The downturns were characterized by the loss of importance in the activities so far performed, and the



ZONING

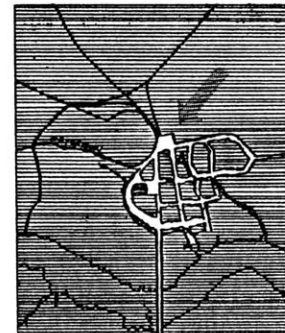
- Palaces, churches and administrative buildings
- Commercial activities



consequent incapacity of the square to attract people as it previously had.

HARVARD SQUARE

Around the 17th century, the area of Harvard Square used to occupy a quite insignificant position in relation to the initial settlement of Cambridge. As an amorphous and wide space on the fringes of the village, it was only a link to the roads leading to neighboring towns. In those days, the attention of the villagers was almost exclusively directed towards the river and its fluvial connections with other settlements. The village's focal point was Winthrop Square (the site south of Mt. Auburn Street and east of Dunster Street), where the market and first meetinghouse were located, as well as the landing of the ferry to Boston. Since the bulk of commercial activities became gradually concentrated in Boston, the market was finally transferred there. Contemporary to this event was the construction of the first bridge crossing the Charles River and the consequent greater importance assumed by the road system. Cambridge, which has started as a very compact settlement at the edge of the river, reoriented its expansion in the direction of the routes to Charlestown and Watertown. Harvard Square slowly assumed a more centralized position within the village. Nevertheless, the

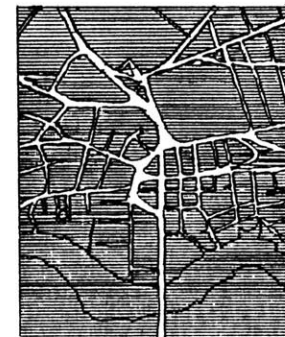


Central position gradually assumed by the square

1670



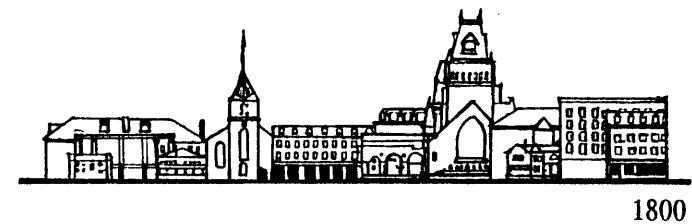
1845



1890

first buildings located at its southern edge ignored its presence, turning it their back and facing the village. As time passed by, Harvard College built more buildings northeast of the square and numerous shops were located at its periphery. The more enclosed the open space became by the adjacent buildings, the more clearly defined was its shape, as well as its role as a point of confluence. All traffic between the city and the suburbs, and the nearby towns converged to the area. It is not surprising that the omnibus terminus and the subway station were located there. Due to economic growth, the city experienced various periods of intense building development, as well as a diversification of the commercial activities. These changes had a direct impact on the square, expressed through a denser land occupation and more sophisticated architectonic styles and shops.

The development of Harvard Square seems to have followed a quite linear path. It was generated as a traffic node and, as such, a focal point for people and activities of varied nature. Time has allowed the reinforcement of this character, which is still maintained today. The square has never experienced a period of decadence, i.e., it has increasingly assumed a greater importance in relation to the city.



The buildings around the square very loosely define its space, without determining a sense of enclosure and containment. This spatial relation among the buildings reinforces its main function as a place of transition, where people and vehicles circulate freely, bound to different points. Building typology as well as activities are distributed according to a clear zoning, which has happened spontaneously (without a preconceived plan). The east side of the square is occupied by the university, while the others present a wide variety of commercial and residential buildings. This organization and coexistence of activities has guaranteed a very rich mixture of uses and users, giving the square a dynamic atmosphere.

Architecturally speaking, the adjacent buildings have been periodically remodeled respecting the formal configuration established in the beginning of the 19th century, when the square finally became encircled by buildings. The most significant past transformation happened in the second half of the last century, when most of the buildings grew one or two floors higher and extended to the lot lines. This modification has only emphasized the definition of the space, with no radical change in its basic characteristics. However, recently the square has experienced a set of more drastic reformulations, aimed at minimizing a critical situation: the overabundance of vehicles cutting across its space. The adjacent streets were

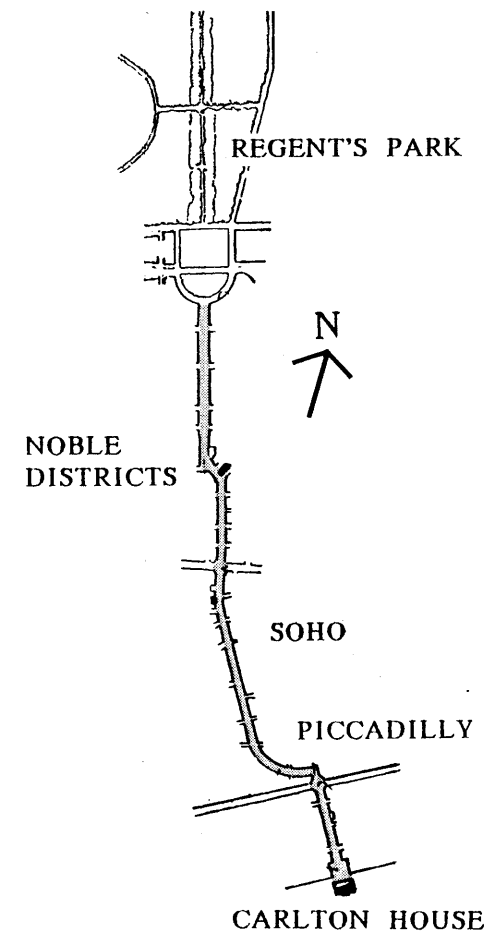


Buildings define the space without harming its main characteristics as a place of transition

not originally planned for such an intense traffic, which is overwhelming the presence of pedestrians. The restructure of vehicular circulation tackles a delicate balance. It should not restrict the rich variety of uses traditionally found in the area.

PICCADILLY CIRCUS

The character and form of Piccadilly Circus result to a great extent from John Nash's design for Regent Street. It was conceived as an aristocratic thoroughfare to link the nobility living at the north (around Regent's Park) with the royal residence and Parliament at the south. On the other hand, it also created a connection, or defined a clearer boundary, between the old and chaotic Soho area to the east, and the noble and organized districts at the west. In any case, Piccadilly Circus was very much benefited by this convergency of different people from all directions. In addition, it was the intersection of Regent Street and Piccadilly, which figured among the main commercial thoroughfares of the city at that time, leading to some of its most important spots. The Circus was immediately transformed into one of the busiest traffic junctions of central London and a major interchange in the public transportation. The shape of Piccadilly Circus, as well as that of the Quadrant, is an example of



Main connections established by Regent Street and Piccadilly Circus

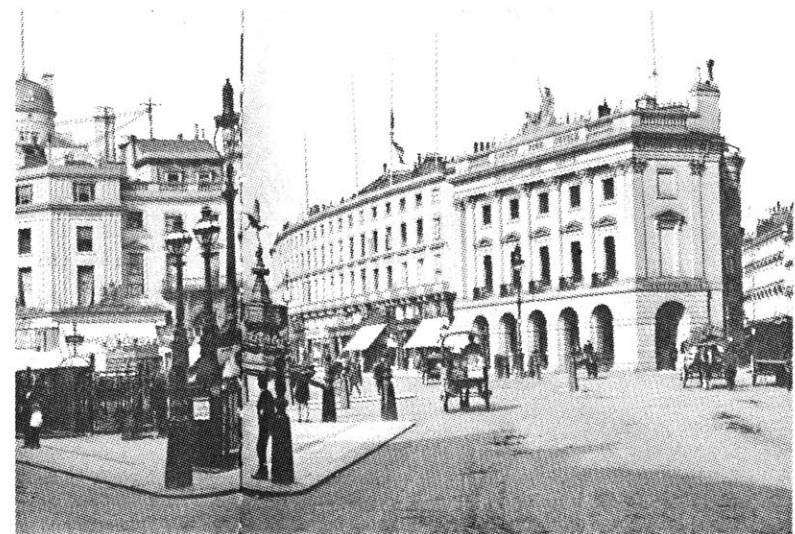
the decisions adopted a priori by Nash, when trying to accommodate the "royal mile" to functional requirements of the city fabric: whenever the street crossed a main artery, a circular space would be formed; whenever the direction was altered, a monumental building would terminate the previous line and its continuation would be carried on by means of circular sections connecting the proper parts.

Piccadilly Circus soon became the heart of London's entertainment district and a commercial center of high fashion and sophisticated shops. But as early as the second half of the 19th century, the elegance envisaged by Nash's plan was diminished. This decline was caused by the opening of other modern and broad avenues, following the development and rapid expansion of the city. Shaftesbury Avenue was constructed diagonally to the circle following the latest fashion. The Circus then became an amorphous meeting of streets and awkwardly shaped blocks, in contrast to its original circular shape, strengthened by the surrounding uniform buildings in a concave form. This situation originated an endless discussion centered on the physical organization of the Circus. The crucial issue was the restoration of its formal cohesion, while attending to traffic demands. Initially the authorities approached selected architects and requested proposals for the redevelopment of the Circus. The plan presented by

Disruption of the
formal cohesion
of the Circus



before Shaftesbury Avenue

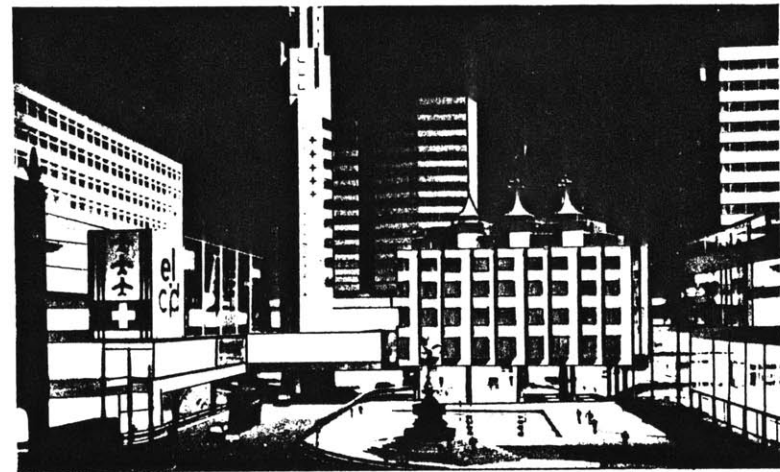


after opening the avenue

Blomfield gave a more harmonious appearance to the facades of the encircling buildings, but the circulation problems were not improved. They were even further aggravated by the opening of the subway station, which delivered an enormous number of people daily to the area. In addition, the street traffic was intensified, as well as the number of shops, offices and entertainment attractions.

The focus of concern was then reoriented from formal to functional issues. The question became how to reconcile the use of Piccadilly Circus as a traffic intersection with its function as a place for pedestrians, who were engaged in the various activities taking place in its surroundings. The governmental agency then adopted a different attitude. It assumed a stronger role, formulating explicit regulations for the type and shape of buildings, and for the traffic organization. During the 1950's and 1960's a complete new approach was offered by developers, who suggested the total destruction of the Circus. High-rise towers surrounded by wide roads and abundant parking space were proposed, with the manifested intention of increasing office floor area at the expense of entertainment. These proposals denied all the aspects that have been traditionally responsible for the intense level of activities and peculiar atmosphere of Piccadilly Circus. They implied the disruption of the feeling of enclosure, the familiar configuration of

Clear-fell proposals
presented by developers
during the 1950-1960's



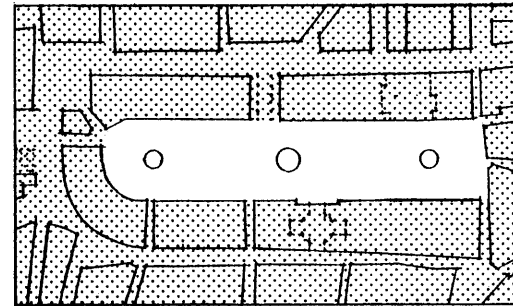
facades, the direct relation between pedestrians and buildings, as well as the wide and balanced range of activities appealing to different people. Despite their persuasive character, none of the designs was approved. The authorities were perplexed: on the one hand, they were presented with powerful and destructive proposals of developers; and, on the other hand, they could rely only on a weak and unclear response from the public. Finally in the 1970's, public opinion reached a precise consensus about the redevelopment of the Circus. Sensitive to the public pressure, the authorities decided for the conservation of the main characteristics of the square (in terms of its form, scale and activities), while restricting traffic and improving pedestrian circulation.

The history of Piccadilly Circus can be divided in three phases, each having a specific meaning, and starting with a significant event related to its form and use. The first phase was inaugurated in 1820, when the Circus was created. It was a period of liveliness and exuberance marked by a harmonious relation between physical organization and activities. The second began with the construction of Shaftesbury Avenue in 1886. The Circus experienced a phase of decadence because one of its functions, traffic intersection, became extremely heavy, overwhelming the other uses. Its decline could be visually perceived through the disruption of its formal coherence.

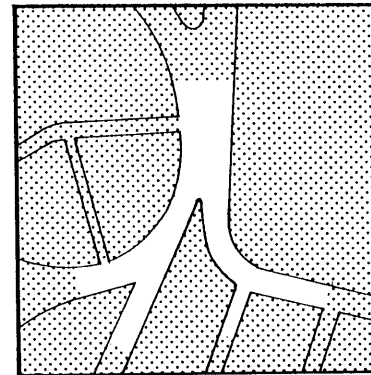
The last phase has its starting point in the late 1970's, when the Greater London Council decided to implement exclusively the formal changes necessary to revitalize the physical configuration of the Circus, while reestablishing the balance between the various activities performed.

SUMMARY

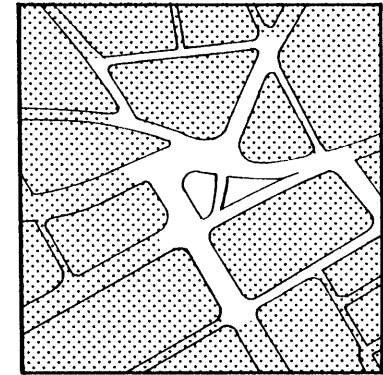
In this section the main aspects influencing the character of a square will be discussed in reference to its form, use and relation to the city. These three categories are based on the previous section which suggested the connection between the popularity or decadence of a square and its formal, functional and contextual changes. A parallel analysis will be established: on the one hand, the morphological transformations of the squares through time; on the other hand, the nature and intensity of the activities performed. Before examining the third category, the interrelationship established between the formal and the functional categories will be explored. This juxtaposed analysis derives from the fact that form and use can be interpreted as aspects intrinsic to the square, referring directly to its space, whereas, the relation of the square with the city means an extrapolation of the square itself, since it deals with a connection oriented towards the exterior. Then, the study will be completed with the examination of the square within its context, in terms of the role it assumes in its area of influence and the characteristics of its accessibility. These categories, due to the tight nature of their correlation, are not considered independently. They are interpreted as a whole with



Piazza Navona



Harvard Square



Piccadilly Circus

identifiable components. Attempts to separate them may imply a false hierarchical order or a linear cause-effect relationship.

Let us step back for a moment and look exclusively at the plan of these squares. We could find a large number of reasons to regard them as design failures. Piazza Navona denies some of the commonly accepted rules of planning, having a very rigid shape with one of the dimensions much larger than the other. It does not offer pleasant views or wide perspectives. Indeed it is heavily enclosed by buildings and almost has a claustrophobic feeling. Harvard Square, as a physical structure, cannot be outlined in a map. It is a chaotic intersection of streets and pedestrian paths, with no clear definition. Piccadilly Circus has its original circular form thoroughly disrupted. One would have difficulty in pointing out its boundaries, solely regarding its physical elements. However, these places are extremely lively and well-known for their appealing atmosphere.

Inasmuch as the desirable environmental quality of the squares is not directly related to general principles of "good" design, we shall proceed to another category: use. From the examples examined, it is possible to point out two distinct types of activities: one stationary, while the other is characterized by movement. In Piazza Navona,

action is contained within its internal space. It is itself an objective: people go to the square with the specific purpose of joining the activities that take place there. They are the focus of attention, while circulation assumes a secondary role. The connection of the Piazza to the bordering streets is therefore modest and apparently unimportant. In this way, the activities enclosed by the square must be sufficiently attractive to justify the confluence of pedestrians. Harvard Square and Piccadilly Circus illustrate the other case. As traffic nodes, they are particularly distinguished by the constant movement of vehicles and people, which is strongly concentrated in and around the intersection of the main thoroughfares, spreading gradually along them and the adjacent streets. They are basically places to pass through on the way to a final destination. As such, they rely crucially on their roles as circulation nodes to guarantee the flow of cars and pedestrians, and subsequently to attract other activities. It is evident that these uses are very different in nature and both are able to attract people as well. But looking more closely at our surroundings, we discover examples of urban spaces marked by activities of a stationary nature and practically abandoned. We run also into cases of very dynamic circulation intersections that are completely overtaken by traffic with the total suppression of pedestrians. It becomes clear that, in order to explain the reputation

shared by these squares, a convincing argument cannot be sustained exclusively by a study and classification of uses.

Even though neither form nor use can be pointed out separately as decisive aspects in the liveliness of a square, together they perform a very significant role. They relate to each other on a reciprocal basis: the form of a square can enhance or inhibit some types of activities (depending on its dimensions, shape and degree of definition), while activities can induce major changes in its physical organization. Referring back to the selected examples, the relationship between the well-defined and enclosed form of Piazza Navona and its traditional use as a container of activities can be highlighted. In the same fashion, the loosely delineated form of Harvard Square seems to be adequate to its use as a traffic intersection. It favors the free flowing of vehicles and people that blurs its boundaries in an endless motion. Piccadilly Circus illustrates a situation where the physical configuration has hindered activities. The clear and rigid shape of its original plan was too tight for a traffic node. By examining the relationship between form and use in the three squares, it becomes possible to clarify to some extent the causes of their attractive power: the appropriateness and coherence between these two main characteristics.

This balance between form and use is further complemented by the introduction of the third category: the relation of the square with the city. It regards the importance assumed by the square within the urban context, in terms of its functional aspects and accessibility. These aspects are tightly linked together in a relation of strong interdependence. Piazza Navona, for instance, during the Roman Empire was a place for celebrating important civic events. This function has been perpetuated and partially explains its transformation in the 12th century into a residential and commercial center for the nobility, as well as its contemporary use for the commemoration of the Feast of the Epiphany. However, this utilization of the area cannot be disassociated from its location adjacent to prominent roads. Harvard Square is simultaneously characterized as a vital intersection in the transportation network of the city and between it and neighboring towns. It is also a place for gathering and getting in touch with novelty. Piccadilly Circus functions as a very active focal point, either of the traffic connecting major areas within London, or of the commercial and entertainment district. Although each one of the squares lodges particular functions, there are two characteristics constantly expressed by them all. One is their very broad public character, i.e., their use is addressed to the city as a whole, avoiding the notion of

belonging to a specific group or neighborhood. The other is their reliance on a relatively easy accessibility to guarantee the confluence of people. This examination of the contextual relations of the squares reveals, therefore, two more situations favorable to the liveliness of urban spaces.

Within the discussion of the three categories together and their interconnection, it becomes meaningful to examine their behavior in situations of change. This comes from the fact that the squares studied present dissimilar processes of transformation. Nonetheless, these have always involved formal, functional and contextual aspects, and they have aimed at the same objective: to maintain or recuperate the liveliness and dynamic atmosphere of the squares. In each case the categories are modified differently. The intensity of their transformation is determined by their proportional participation in the interrelations established. The shape of Piazza Navona, for example, has always had a powerful appeal, due to its ancient tradition. Its physical configuration has been preserved while activities are proposed or replaced to conserve its liveliness. Harvard Square resulted from a harmonious process of definition and adaptation among the three categories. The conflict between form and use felt in the last few decades was worked out through compromise: simultaneous to the restraint of functional demands, some

formal changes took place. In Piccadilly Circus, functional aspects have very often received primary attention at the expense of the physical organization. Only in modern times was it realized that the dominant importance given to use should be controlled, and, at the same time, emphasis should be placed on the formal characteristics of the circle in order to maintain its attractive atmosphere.

Until this point the analysis has been centered on the characteristics inherent to the squares: their form and activities, their relation to the city, and their changes. Now it is time to complete the picture with the inclusion of users, since their presence is the only measure of the attractive power of a place. Once we approach the discussion from the human point of view, a square acquires a much more comprehensive existence. It is transformed into an image, which reveals the three analytical categories and their interrelations, but which goes far beyond them. This image expresses the meanings and emotions incited by the square in a diversity of people. Its peculiar character is responsive to their needs and expectations. In addition, an image is not a static mental representation of a place. It expresses the processes of transformation experienced by a square, which have affected its form, use and relation to the urban environment since its generation. It exerts, therefore, a direct influence on the way a square is perceived at any given period.

An image also denotes the continuous changes in the meanings attributed to places by people. As an illustration, a period of decadence faced by Piazza Navona could be mentioned. The square, as a marketplace, lost its brilliance and lure when people became interested in more sophisticated forms of entertainment and social life.

Starting from a historical approach, this analysis has explored the inherent morphological and functional characteristics of urban spaces, and their interrelationships that favor a lively atmosphere. It has also examined to what extent their attractive power is affected by their connections with the city. The inclusion of the processes of transformation provided a clearer direction to the investigation. It demonstrated the need for appropriateness among the most relevant characteristics of a square --its form and use--, and their reciprocal influence. It also revealed the importance of having a relatively easy accessibility, as well as a significant role within the urban context. In addition, it demonstrated the urge of a lively square to meet people's expectations, having an appealing image. People are attracted to a place, depending on their perception of its character and the meanings it suggests.

Finally, the historical perspective allowed us to understand urban spaces as more than a formal arrangement of

shapes and volumes to which uses are given. It provided a time dimension, able to embody the dynamic process of evolution experienced by these places. This evolution happens through changes in the intrinsic characteristics of the squares, their interrelations with the urban context, as well as the meanings and images they incite in people.

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